

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor

Staff

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade
Patrice Faulkner
Dennis Fischman
Rona Fischman
Natasha Sierra

Meeting Minutes

June 25, 2020

Via GoTo Meeting Webinar

Online Video Platform

04:00 pm

The meeting began at 4:21 pm.

Attending: FHC members Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, and Rona Fischman;
City staff, Bryant Gaspard.

Minute distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members and others attending; also posted to City website.

I. Standing Agenda Items

Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes from the May 28, 2020 meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard. Dennis Fischman made a *motion* to accept the minutes which was seconded by Patrice Faulkner and unanimously *approved*.

Facebook page update: Dennis discussed two Facebook posts that were the most popular and had the most engagement (i.e., shares). One of the Facebook posts was a question that read “My landlord has agreed to let me sublet my apartment. Do the fair housing laws apply to me?” Dennis explained that the primary tenant is "the landlord" now, so they are bound by all the laws that apply to landlords, including fair housing laws. When advertising a sublease, the primary tenant must adhere to fair housing laws that apply to landlords.

The other Facebook post was a question about what was the difference between the protected classes of National Origin and Ancestry. Dennis explained that National Origin determines what country an individual is from. Ancestry determines what country your parents are from.

Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant informed the commissioners that there were three fair housing complaints received in June. He shared that two of three fair housing complaints were based on the protected class of Familial status (having children) and the third was based on Race. All three fair housing complaints have been logged into the City data base and referred to Suffolk University’s Housing Discrimination Testing Program. Bryant added that all three complaints occurred in the same week in June and two of the complaints involved the same real estate broker. Rona shared that the state has a Professional licensure department where you could submit a complaint against an individual with a license such as a real estate broker if it has been determined they violated fair

housing law. Bryant stated they he would provide updates on the status and possible outcomes of the three complaints at the next fair housing commission meeting.

II. Update on Specific Activities

Bryant discussed the possibility of each commissioner creating a short a video that would be posted on the City's Fair Housing website, Fair Housing Commission Facebook page and any other social media platform that is appropriate. The videos would be no longer than 3 and half minutes and would cover a range of topics based on each commissioner's personal and professional experience. Bryant shared that he spoke with staff in the City's Communications department and he was informed that the videos could be edited to add introductions, titles and even music. Bryant shared some suggestions for content such as creating videos in Spanish, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He further added that some videos could be created targeting property owners and fair housing exemptions they may have, real estate professionals and households with a Section 8 Voucher or other rental subsidy. The next steps would be for the commissioners to come prepared with scripts about what they will discuss in their video at the July Fair Housing Commission meeting.

Bryant informed the commissioners of the upcoming Race and Source of Income webinar on July 1st that will be discussing a recent report and study about housing discrimination in the Greater Boston Area. The study was conducted by Suffolk University's Housing Discrimination Testing Program and the Analysis Group and was funded by the Boston Foundation. The webinar will discuss the details of a housing discrimination study that focuses on households with and without Section 8 Vouchers and black and white households. The study will provide insight on the difference in treatment between a black household compared to a white household in the search for housing and the treatment of households with and without a Section 8 Voucher.

Bryant discussed that he would be drafting a report on the work the Fair Housing Commission has completed in the past fiscal year (7/1/2019-6/30/2020). The report would be submitted to the Housing and Community Development sub-committee of the Somerville City Council and detail the number of fair housing complaints received in the past fiscal year and initiatives and collaborations the Fair Housing Commission has worked on. Bryant inquired if the commissioners were open to meeting the city council on a webinar to discuss some of the work they have done. Everyone seemed open to meeting with the council members if it was necessary.

III. Announcements

No announcements.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Patrice Faulkner and seconded by Rona Fischman and *approved* unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 pm.